

# **Captain Brian Udell Supersonic Survivor, Inspirational**

Hanging in the straps of his parachute and feeling the cold night air on his face, Brian Udell felt as if a freight train had collided with his body. As he struggled to inflate his life preserver before plunging into the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean, he realized it had shredded with the force of the supersonic windblast. With his teeth and one functioning arm, Brian feverishly retrieved a one-man life raft that hung from a fifteen-foot lanyard off his right hip only seconds before entering the water. After popping back to the surface like a bobber on fishing line, the salt water made him painfully aware of the open wounds, cuts, and scrapes that were strewn over his broken body. The thought of blood pouring into the water inviting sharks for a late night meal motivated him to attempt to get into the partially inflated raft. As he kicked his legs, Brian's lower limbs felt as though only a thread attached them. Exhausted and unable to enter the raft thoughts of death quickly consumed his mind. Knowing he would be unable to survive the night under the extreme conditions, Brian began to pray. The next several hours of survival and the many months of excruciating rehabilitation deliver an almost unbelievable story. Brian holds the record for surviving the highest speed ejection from a U.S. Fighter Aircraft at nearly 800 M.P.H. He survived four grueling hours 65 miles off the Atlantic Coast in 60-degree water, 5-foot seas, and 15 M.P.H. winds at night. Brian's determination, perseverance, faith, and sheer will to survive is unparalleled. His story of survival, recovery, and return to the Strike Eagle is an inspiration to everyone.



Brian is a very accomplished aviator. He began flying at age nine and took his first cross-country flight at age ten. Since that time he has accumulated over 9000 hours in a variety of both civil and military aircraft. He was one of only sixty candidates across the United States selected to attend the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program. Brian graduated number one in his class and was awarded the Air Training Command - Commanders Cup Trophy. Brian was one of the first Lieutenants selected to fly the F-15E Strike Eagle. He graduated from Strike Eagle training and received the top academic award. Brian went on to his operational unit where he became an Instructor, Mission Commander, and Air to Ground Top Gun winner. He has flown over 100 combat missions in Southwest Asia and logged nearly 2000 hours in the Strike Eagle. Brian received four Air Medals and three Aerial Achievement Medal for combat missions over the skies of Iraq. Brian's military career spanned ten years. Brian left the Air Force in 1999 and he is currently a pilot with Southwest Airlines.